

# Editorial

## THE RIGHT ANSWERS REQUIRE THE RIGHT QUESTIONS



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

Where do you turn to for answers to clinical queries that arise during your day at the office? I would speculate that the first port of call in many instances is a trusted colleague, perhaps a textbook in the office, or maybe a journal in which an article happens to deal with the topic. Given the narrow focus of most journal articles and the fact that we often store back editions in the most inaccessible of places, the chance of the latter being at hand is rare.

We tend to look for information where it is easiest to find. Our search strategy is often coloured by what I believe is a culture of respect for figures of authority in dentistry, which makes us seek and accept, sometimes without question, the clinical opin-

ions of authority figures, often our colleagues.

I, for one, have often been content to accept a particular approach to solving a clinical problem because someone told me that the solution works "in his hands." That approach is all very well if we can be sure that the source of the information is reliable and unbiased. Unfortunately we cannot be sure this is the case. Our informant may be basing his or her opinions on incomplete information acquired in a non-systematic manner.

There is an old saying "Give a man a fish and you feed him once, teach him how to fish and you help him to feed himself for life." In my opinion, that is the philosophy underlying the series of 6 articles by Dr. Susan Sutherland, which starts in this edition. Dr. Sutherland's series teaches us how to fish for information that will help us solve our clinical dilemmas.

The series will bring us through the process of formulating a proper clinical question, inform us where to search for information, and give us the crucial tools to help us to appraise the quality of the information we retrieve from journal articles and other sources.

In my opinion, asking the proper question is crucial for getting the proper answer to a clinical question. I have seen too many clinicians begin Medline searches with woolly search strategies that lead them nowhere. "If you don't know where you are going, you are sure to get there" goes the old adage, and this surely applies in the field of clinical information retrieval, especially now that there are so many sources of information of dubious quality.

In developing the *Journal* over the past few years, I have always wanted the publication to answer the questions Canadian dentists are asking. I

would like to take this opportunity to invite you to use the framework for formulating clinical questions, presented by Dr. Sutherland in this edition, to make up clinical questions that you would like the *Journal* to answer either through clinical articles or through the clinical abstracts section. If you send me these questions, I will solicit answers from the best sources available to the *JCDA*.

To get rapid answers to crucial questions, you may want to do your own literature search or as a member of CDA, you can arrange for one of the staff at our Resource Centre to conduct the search on your behalf. I think you will find the checklists contained in Dr. Sutherland's subsequent articles invaluable in appraising the quality of the literature you retrieve.

On another note, as part of a conscious decision to work closely with the national dental specialty groups, we are starting a new feature in this edition. Every other month, the Canadian Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiologists (CAOMR) will be submitting a short case for what we are calling the CAOMR Diagnostic Challenge. The format will consist in the presentation of an interesting radiology case with a few challenging questions on a single page. The answers to these questions will be given further back in the same edition.

We are very thankful to this group of specialists for providing us with these challenging cases. We hope that other specialty groups will supply us with similar educational material presented in such a user-friendly format.

John O'Keefe  
1-800-267-6354, ext. 2297  
jokeefe@cda-adc.ca